

An Introduction to the Spiritual World
Agents of Good and Agents of Evil
A Catalyst Study led by Dr. Jeremy Couture

Introduction

- You can't tell the story of Christmas, without talking about the presence and activity of angels.
 - Why didn't Joseph send Mary away and divorce her quietly? (An angel appeared to him in a dream and told him about the special nature of Mary's baby - Matthew 1:20)
 - How did Mary learn about what was happening to her and that she should go visit her cousin Elizabeth? (The angel Gabriel visited her and explained it to her – Luke 2:26-27).
 - How did the shepherd outside of Bethlehem know to go into town and look for the Messiah? (A multitude of angels appeared and told them about it - Luke 2:9-14)
 - Why did Joseph take Mary and Jesus and flee to Egypt? (Once again, an angel appeared to him in a dream – Matt. 2:13)
- Special spiritual beings have played a critical role in God's redemptive story from the time of creation to the time of the incarnation, and beyond.
- We're going to spend the next 4 sessions studying these special agents, both good and evil, starting with an introduction to the spiritual world.
- The book of Genesis describes the world that God made as well as everything in it.
 - The focus is clearly on the physical features of the world as well as plants and animals in it, but there are plenty of references to the spiritual dimension as well.
 - The presence of angels here sets up the expectation of what they are like and what they do in the rest of the Bible.
- The book of Revelation wraps up God's redemptive program for creation and humanity, and we shouldn't be surprised that it's full of angelic activity as well.
- After we look at the angelic activity in Genesis and Revelation, we'll round out our introduction with a list of benefits and one warning in studying angelology.

I. Spiritual Agents in the Book of Genesis

- A. The Spirit of God "was moving over the surface of the waters," and the Triune God counseled together over the creation of mankind. (Gen. 1:1, 26)
- B. Satan (the prince of fallen angels) appeared as a snake and convinced Adam and Eve to disobey God (Gen. 3:1-5)
- C. God stationed cherubim with flaming swords at the entrance to the Garden of Eden so Adam and Eve could not return. (Gen. 3:24)
- D. The angel of the Lord met Hagar in the wilderness on the way to Sur and relayed God's promises to her and her special child. (Gen. 16:7-14, 21:17)
 - 1. Some interpreters see this as a reference to the Lord, Himself, since the angels talks about God in the first person.
 - 2. Moses distinguishes between the two later one when Ishmael was born.
- E. Two angels visit Abraham and Sarah to announce the miraculous birth of their son together. The "men" aren't described as angels until Genesis 19:1. (Gen. 18 – 19)

- F. The angel of the Lord stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son, Isaac, just in time. (Gen. 22:11-12)
- G. Abraham told his servant that an angel would go before him and guide him to the right destination. (Gen. 24:7)
- H. Jacob had a dream on his way to Haran, where angels were ascending and descending on a ladder extended into heaven. (Gen. 28:12-13)
- I. The angel of the Lord relay important information to Jacob about the breeding of Laban's goats. (Gen. 31:11-12)
- J. Jacob encountered the angels of God when we reentered his land and ended up wrestling with "a man" all night long. (Gen. 32:1, 24)
- K. Angels are key figures in the book of Genesis.
 - 1. They deliver messages in dreams and visions.
 - 2. They announce special births.
 - 3. They guide and protect key figures.
 - 4. They highlight the presence of God through their worship of Him.

II. Spiritual Agents in the Book of Revelation

- A. The term *angelos* occurs numerous times in the letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3, but it's best to think of these occurrences as human messengers, not angelic beings.
- B. In John's vision, a "strong" angel calls for someone to "open the book and break its seals." (Rev. 5:2)
- C. In Revelation 7, 4 angels are prevented from executing God's judgment on the earth. (Rev. 7:1-3)
- D. In Revelation 8-10, angels blow trumpets to introduce major features of John's vision. (Rev. 8:2)
- E. In Revelation 17, an angel explains John's visions to him. (Rev. 17)
- F. Satan and his minions are featured throughout Revelation as well, confirming our view of spiritual world throughout the pages of Scripture. In Revelation, angels are the ones who announce and execute God's judgment and deliver messages to God's people.

Discussion Question #1

III. The Benefits of Studying Angels (Millard Erickson, Graham Cole, John Gilhooly)

- A. It's a comfort and encouragement to realize that there are powerful and numerous unseen agents available to us in our time of need.
- B. The angel's praise and service of God give us an example of how we should conduct ourselves what our lives will be like in eternity.
- C. It sobers us to realize that even angels who were close to God succumbed to temptation and fell from His presence.

- D. Knowledge about evil angels serves to alert us to the danger and subtlety of temptation that can be expected from satanic forces.
- E. We receive confidence from the realization that as powerful as Satan and his accomplices are, there are definite limits on what they can do.
- F. The description of angels and their activities fills a blind spot in our worldview that we could not fill without the clarity of Scripture.
- G. An understanding of the Biblical nature of angels and demons is a starting place for those who are trying to defend the Christian faith.

Discussion Question #2

IV. A Warning About Studying Angels

- A. Be careful that the study of angels doesn't spoil the gospel.
 - 1. The 19th century theologian J.C. Ryle described spoiling the gospel as, "an exaggerated importance to the secondary things of Christianity and a diminished importance to the first things."
 - 2. Albert Mohler, the president of Southern Seminary urges believers to practice "Theological Triage."
 - a. First-level theological issues would include those doctrines most central and essential to the Christian faith, such as the Trinity, the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, justification by faith, and the authority of Scripture. (Christian/Unchristian)
 - b. Second-level theological issues are distinguished from the first-order set by the fact that believing Christians may disagree on the second-order issues – like the meaning and mode of baptism (Different congregations and denominations)
 - c. Third-level issues are theological issues are doctrines which Christians may disagree and remain in close fellowship, even within local congregations – eschatology and angelology.
- B. The danger is to give more weight to this subject than it is due. That is why we are studying angels together, but we are only going to spend 4 weeks.

Discussion Question #3

Conclusion

- The Biblical world is a spiritual world as well as physical one. We must be aware of the activity of angels if we are to see the world from a Biblical perspective.
- Prayer: "Thank you Lord for the invisible ministry of angels and please protect us from the harmful effects of Satan and his minions."

Discussion Questions

1. The references to angels in these two books of the Bible are very light on details, meaning they don't tell us as much as we want to know. How would the story of redemption be different if it didn't include any information about the presence and activity of angels?
2. Which one of the six benefits of studying angelology resonates with you how can you incorporate that insight into your ongoing walk with the Lord?
3. Have you ever seen unhealthy levels of interest in angelic activity? How did you know that the level of interest was beyond what is Biblically appropriate?